Regionalism in King County:

Exploring Argument and Experience to Guide Regional Reform

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Introduction

On February 12, 2001, King County Executive Ron Sims invited the King County Council and all departments to solve "the most serious Current Expense Fund financial problem in memory." Short-term financial difficulties include a projected $36 million imbalance in 2002. This imbalance is attributed to a 2001 budget that used one-time revenues and reserves to balance a budget contained ongoing expenditures that exceed ongoing revenues by $14 million. The additional $22 million results primarily from a growth in wages and benefits in excess of an annual growth in revenues. The long-term problem, Sims notes, "is that our fundamental general fund structure is broken." Base expenditures, especially wages and benefits, are increasing at a rate of 6% while revenues are rising at about 3%. The result is the need to cut $20 million from the budget every year after 2002. Sims notes, "The voters have made their wishes very clear. They expect us to operate more efficiently, to spend less of their tax money on government programs unless they vote to approve additional taxes for specific services" (Sims).

As the King County Department of Natural Resources does its part to search for new efficiencies in service delivery and regulation, it must take into account the regional nature of problems facing our environment. Issues such as the endangerment of salmon, water quality, transportation, and air quality do not contain themselves within municipal boundaries and require the coordination of numerous city, county, and state agencies. With 39 cities and over 100 special districts in King County, an abundance of processes and coordination make it difficult to reach agreement on agency responsibilities, specific actions to address problems, and how to pay for them. The desire of the County Executive to reach out to all departments in search of solutions to financial problems provides an opportunity for the Department of Natural Resources to explore the possibilities of implementing regional decision-making structures to gain greater efficiency, achieve economies of scale, and save the taxpayers time and money.

The effort to reexamine service delivery and regulation by the Department of Natural Resources prompts several questions:

- What types of regional decision-making bodies exist today in order to deliver or coordinate key services, planning, or regulation?
- Can these institutions reduce costs and ensure accountability?

The answers to these questions require an understanding of the characteristics of service delivery trends in King County, a background on the development of regional institutions across the nation,

and exposure to the current debate regarding the economic efficiency of regionally coordinated service delivery. This document will provide assistance to this effort by:

- Examining the principles of the economic debate surrounding centralizing service delivery,
- Providing examples of regional coordination efforts across the nation through various means including government reform and intermunicipal agreements, and
- Providing recommendations based on national experiences in regionalism in order to assist DNR in developing an agenda for coordinated service delivery and regulation in King County and the Puget Sound.

The future of successful service delivery in King County depends on the ability of its governing institutions to adapt to the demands of its constituency. It is becoming clear that the government reform ahead must develop a system of service delivery and regulation that can do more with less. This paper explores whether prominent existing regional governance models hold promise in rethinking the management of King County's natural resources in an effort to achieve this end.

Sims, Ron. Letter to King County Councilmember Pete von Reichbaucher. 12 Feb. 2001

What Is A Region

"Regions are ultimately a state of mind, a convention. They exist in untold numbers, interwoven and overlapping" (Starrs 1)

Consolidation and restructuring of government authorities to achieve greater "regional" efficiency might need to begin with a common understanding of what a "region" in fact is. The trouble is that a region can be constituted in a number of ways to reflect numerous characteristics of nature and society. In the end, it amounts to a mapped geographical area with a meaning specific to the creator.

In his essay "The importance of places, or, a sense of where you are", Paul Starrs outlines six contemporary regional categories: 1) the Ecosystem, 2) the Regional Authority, 3) the Vernacular Region, 4) Bioregions and Watersheds, 5) Cultural Areas, Ethnic Regions and Homelands, and 6) Nodes in the Global Exchange. The categories most applicable to the political realities of structuring regional governance and service delivery mechanisms are the Ecosystem, Bioregions and Watersheds, and the Regional Authority. These categories reflect the political and geographical issues at the core of setting service delivery boundaries.

The Ecosystem, Starrs contends, is as much a political boundary as a scientific one, born more out of "convenience than biographical necessity". Regional air quality or Park Management organizations can draw map boundaries to define political responsibility in a certain regional ecosystem area, but they are subject to hazards such as non-point source pollution that cannot be controlled exclusively within the defined area and may necessitate the cooperation of numerous governments whose authorities encompass areas of the greater ecosystem.

Bioregions and Watersheds also have their roots in the environment. Starrs uses this category to illustrate those regions of bio-self-sufficiency. Bioregionalists promote consciousness of local control and more harmonious management of lands citing examples of the lifestyles of traditional peoples. They promote watershed consciousness and note the dangers of growth and the continuing disassociation between the community and the ecosystem. Though less influential, this category of region parallels those arguments of local control and community empowerment that push to limit the boundaries of larger regional governments in favor of smaller independent communities.

The Regional Authority is that government structure created to coordinate citizens and municipalities in order to handle service delivery and policy problems that can include sewage,

transit, water systems and planning. These authorities are politically created with boundaries that extend to county lines, planned service areas, or city limits. Boundaries are established by citizens and lawmakers in the legislative and political processes and are generally set to meet existing administrative boundaries to reduce overlap and confusion.

Governing The Puget Sound "Region"

The question of "region" that concerns government in the Puget Sound rests in these previous three contemporary classifications. The Puget Sound is the common identifier for the major urban, economic, and environmental region of Washington State. This poses an interesting problem if the Department seeks the consolidation of government authorities that are responsible for several functions within this region. As an ecosystem and system of bioregions including numerous watersheds, the Puget Sound region can encompass as many as 12 county authorities (Puget Sound Online). The political, urban, and economic region of the Puget Sound, on the other hand, usually encompasses the three major counties of Pierce, King, and Snohomish. Attempts to encompass the influences of the environment within the boundary of a single political or regulatory authority clearly faces the challenges of size and coverage.

A region can be defined in numerous terms and each attempt to geographically map a specifically defined region will result in the overlap or exclusion of characteristics that will influence the political debate as well as the effectiveness of policy implementation. An ecosystem region cannot contain all of the influences of nature. A bioregion competes with social and political philosophy of living in local means but may ignore its impacts on the greater defined region outside of the immediate vicinity. A regional authority, political in nature, rests its power and authority on the ever changing will of the people. Regardless of the problems or complications, the multitude of regions exists conceptually. In using the term "region" throughout the context of regional government restructuring, it is important to remember that different communities establish different regional concepts and different regional needs. The ambiguous nature of defining "regions" poses challenges to regional governance reform. Attempts to apply a regional model of governance from one area to meet the needs of another region may prove to be difficult since the political, legal, and conceptual foundations could differ significantly.

Puget Sound Online. 10 Aug. 2000. Puget Sound Water Quality Action Team. 21 April 2001. http://www.wa.gov/puget_sound/About_Sound/County.htm

Starrs, Paul. "The importance of places, or, a sense of where you are." Spectrum: the Journal of State Government v67 n3 (1994).

A History of Regionalism and Consolidation in King County

Though serving the region may be a complex matter when it comes to definition, King County is already home to a prime example of a special purpose government designed to foster greater consistency and efficiency in service delivery in an urban and regional sense: King County Metro. This success stands out against the numerous failures of similar initiatives elsewhere that have attempted to merge City and County responsibilities. The history of Metro consolidation and the failures of similar attempts elsewhere highlight the political dangers of achieving greater regional responsibility.

Metro: From Seattle to King County

Seattle Metro, approved by voters in 1958, was initially created to collect and treat sewage throughout a two-county area in order to improve water quality and control the growing pains of the new post-war suburban areas. Jim Ellis, Metro's founder, understood that water and sewage treatment issues were regional problems needing a regional solution that promoted cooperation among King County and its suburban cities. After 14 years of sewage infrastructure construction and citizen support, Metro's powers were expanded to include transit planning, laying the framework for the massive and nationally recognized bus system that exists today (Lane 37)

Metro was established as a regional form of government after its founders looked to other examples across the United States and Canada, focusing especially on Toronto. Toronto's regional government was established as a two-tier federation with the upper tier managing regional problems and lower tier of municipalities providing local services (League 6). This idea not only inspired the creation of Metro, but in 1974 would also inspire talks about merging Metro with King County, a concept that would rest in political limbo for 16 years due to opposition by local citizen committees and municipalities (Lane 50). In 1990, local residents made the case that the organization of Metro's governing council, a mix of appointees and elected members from those areas serviced by Metro (similar to Toronto's former two-tier representative structure), violated the equal rights provisions of the 14th Amendment. In his opinion, U.S. District Judge William Dwyer stated that Metro was an elected body, violated the 14th Amendment and must change its method of selecting members by April 3, 1992. After two years and a missed deadline prompting possible action from the court to limit council voting powers, on November 3, 1992, voters approved Metro's merger with King County. Over the next three years, this merger established a new form of government for both Metro and King County, a government with the characteristics of both a county and a special service district. The merger also expanding the number of elected County members from 9 to 13. The new list of County responsibilities included countywide land-use policy, public

transit, sewage disposal, public health, safety, human services and the administration of justice (Lane 91).

A Success Among Failures

The events unfolding from the birth of Seattle Metro to its merger into King County illustrate many of the accomplishments and difficulties faced by government consolidation and efforts to regionalize. Citizen groups feared losing local autonomy, feared bigger government and failed ballot proposals to increase funds and powers. The Seattle Metro plan met with failure and controversy before its final approval, as did its merger with King County.

Since 1805, there have been an estimated 27 successful efforts to merge or consolidate existing cities and/or counties across the United States and more than 100 efforts have failed. Eight of the successful mergers occurred between 1805 and 1907. Nearly all of the 20 other mergers occurred in smaller communities of less than 100 thousand people. The merger of Metro and King County stands out as an unusual merger given that King County was the 13th most populous county in the United States at the time (King County 1)

The reasons that so many mergers have been both proposed and failed, as well as an explanation of the citizen opposition faced by those creators of the new King County government, can be illustrated by examining the theoretical and regulatory framework of the time. The dominant competing theories in regionalism, Institutional Reform Theory and Public Choice Theory, illustrate the political and economic divide between the proponents and opponents of regional service delivery. While these theories provide foundations for the debate over the effectiveness and efficiency of regional service delivery mechanisms, the federal government has been providing incentive and support for the creation of regional authorities.

King County Council. *"King County-Metro: A New Government."* Report to the Public King County-Metro, 1994

Lane, Bob. Better Than Promised: an informal history of the Municipality of Metropolitan Seattle. King County Municipal Services, 1995

League of Women Voters. Regional Governmental Structures. Seattle: League of Women Voters, 1971.

Regionalism: Argument, Theory, and Federal Incentive

To understand the foundations of regional governance as it exists in King County, Washington State and across the nation, it is beneficial to begin with the theoretical framework surrounding the political fragmentation and consolidation of special-purpose governments or districts. Social scientists and public officials offer two predominant perspectives on specialized governance in metropolitan economies: Institutional Reform and Public Choice.

Institutional Reform Theory

Institutional Reform theory rests on four major tenets. First, metropolitan political fragmentation results in chaotic and inefficient service provisions lacking coordination and neglecting regional concerns. Second, fragmented government leads to wasteful duplication and administrative inefficiency resulting in higher public outlays. Third, government multiplicity leads to citizen confusion and apathy due to jurisdiction overlap. This prevents citizens from holding their governments accountable and voicing demands effectively, leading to higher costs or inefficient service delivery. Finally, the desirable parity between goods and services across jurisdictions is hampered by fiscal disparities and inequities caused by a mismatch between service needs and tax resources (Foster 28-30). Because of these inequities and inefficiencies, institutional reformers promote the centralization of service delivery in order to produce economies of scale, lower transaction costs, lower information costs, and provide more equitable service delivery across social classes.

Criticisms of this theory rest primarily on the limited conception of specialized governance and presumptions of ill effects on metropolitan organizations. Reformists often ignore class, size, and function of special districts, overlooking sub-types such as multi-purpose agencies that may have beneficial outcomes for regions. Additionally, the ill effects of fragmentation (higher public outlays, inefficiency, etc.) predicted by Reformists have not been convincingly supported by empirical evidence, an issue to be discussed later (33-35).

Public Choice Theory

Developed by economists and political scientists since the 1940's, the public choice perspective of metropolitan service delivery rests on the application of economic principles to political concerns such as resource allocation and voting behavior. Presuming that consumers have diverse service delivery needs, residents operate in a competing market of governments in search of an area that provides the bundle of public services that reflects their demands. Governments seek to attract residents by providing multiple combinations of services to meet the needs pf a diverse public. Public Choice theorists see fragmentation and multiplicity as a positive response to the needs of

residents and a method of increasing accountability to citizen demands. Increased public outlays in instances will reflect the demands of citizens seeking increased service delivery while at the same time controlling government spending as well (35-37).

The most serious criticism of the public choice perspective rests on the presumption that specialized districts are indeed competing with each other for residents. Metropolitan authorities typically enjoy a spatial monopoly of service delivery. Some more specialized districts that are providing a service may enjoy monopolies on a newly created market or may have carved out a small niche, and can avoid competition. As a result, service delivery through fragmentation and decentralization may likely create cost-increasing monopolies as well as cost-decreasing competitive economies (39-41).

These perspectives describe the different purposes and interests fulfilled by specialized governance either in reducing fragmentation or increasing the number of districts and illustrate the content of the public debate. Citizens often reflect these primary perspectives when mobilizing in support or opposition to implementing regional governance structures. If the Department of Natural Resources considers mobilizing the public and elected officials to support government consolidation, these perspectives will shape the debate and the Department must be prepared to address both the positive and negative concerns of regional service delivery to develop strong support.

Though this paper is primarily interested in efforts to consolidate regional governance, both theoretical perspectives offer views that can help shape government reform efforts in order to meet the needs of the region and diverse interests of the residents while at the same time reducing fragmentation. The arguments outlined in the Public Choice perspective are important to the arguments developed by citizen opposition groups and need consideration when promoting the development of regional authorities. But while these perspectives illustrate the theoretical foundation of government reform efforts, the federal government, since the 60's, has produced real fiscal incentives and regulatory mandates that promote greater regional cooperation and regional government efforts.

The Federal Government: Promoting Regionalism

Federal mandates, as well as the theoretical attractiveness of greater efficiency and equality, have promoted and accelerated the establishment of regional special-purpose councils since the early 50's. The Federal Housing Act of 1954 accelerated their establishment by providing 50-50 matching grants for urban area planning by regional, metropolitan, or state agencies. In 1954, The Act was broadened to encourage more "comprehensive" planning of greater urban areas having common problems, broaden eligibility, and require intergovernmental coordinated planning.

(Kincaid par. 45) Since the Housing Act, other incentives and requirements for greater regional planning followed:

- 1961 - federal incentives and requirements for metropolitan planning organizations and regional conservation and development districts
- 1968 - economic development districts
- 1970 - criminal justice and coordination councils
- 1973 - area-wide agencies on aging
- 1977 - air-quality control regions
- 1990 - Clean Water Act Amendments: regional water quality authorities
- 1991 - Transportation Efficiency Act: transportation planning organizations

Responding to this promotion of greater regional planning, many states established systems of substate regional councils. These systems have established themselves since the 60's despite a reduction in federal funding and support through the 80's due to Reagan's opposition to regional entities. The 90's have brought a revival of regional thinking as the federal government has encouraged regional transportation planning (par. 50).

Perspective and Incentive Guide Regional Organization

The opposing theories of service delivery and the demands of the federal government shape a political and legislative context that each region must explore if seeking a consolidation of services. Citizen opposition to such consolidation will likely reflect those ideas illustrated by the Public Choice perspective, while supporters will reflect those arguments supported by the Institutional Reform perspective. Neither perspective provides a conclusion as to what services nor authorities are appropriate to regionalize, but they do shape the political debate and can affect the legislative outcome through citizen mobilization. Conversely, the federal government has developed incentives and mandates that encourages regional organization around key issues, but does not highlight the proper method of doing so. Ultimately, the proper structure to be developed for regional service delivery balances the guidelines of the federal government and state law, as well as the demands of the citizens and legislature, a formula unique to each region. The following section highlights common methods of achieving greater area-wide or regional service delivery and provides examples of regional governments that have established the support of their respective legislatures and citizens. When considering these methods, DNR should keep in mind the unique contexts of each success and its applicability (or non-applicability) to the Puget Sound region.

Foster, Kathryn. The Political Economy of Special-Purpose Government. Washington: Georgetown University, 1997

Kincaid, John. Regulatory Regionalism in Metropolitan Areas: Voter Resistance and Reform Persistence. Pace University Law Center Land Use Website. 10 May 2001 http://www.law.pace.edu/landuse/

Alternatives in Regional Governance

While the federal government has provided incentives to for regional districts or governments, and states have followed suit, numerous forms of consolidation and methods of reforming service delivery have been established. Each form provides a set of political and service efficiencies that respond to the demands of the lawmakers and citizens of that region. The alternatives to any current form of government are numerous and limited only to the political and social realities of the region. Following is a summary of regional reform methods illustrated in a report by the City of Seattle Office of Policy Planning in 1978. The report was commissioned to investigate the reform of the City of Seattle in an effort to achieve a more regional style of government.

Annexation

At the turn of the century, annexation was the primary method of incorporating less populous subordinate local and unincorporated units into larger incorporated units that offered more municipal services. Annexation has slowed due to the expansion of home-rule legislation that has provided municipalities with greater stability and protection from state interference and broader defense against annexation or incorporation. While annexation can increase a city's tax base, improve services in annexed areas, and create a better sense of regionality, annexed residents may see higher costs or tax increases and a loss of political power. Additionally, in Washington, annexation is a difficult and time-consuming process. (Seattle 39)

Interlocal Agreement or Transfer of Functions

Interlocal agreements and functional transfers are common in government and span a wide range of services and functions. For over a century, governments have engaged in these formal or informal agreements for the provision of services. Solid waste collection is a common service provided by a larger government bodies through agreements with local jurisdictions in an effort to achieve economies of scale and provide consistent service over a specific region. However, contracting services to higher levels of government can complicate the government process with multiple legal agreements and may not realize better regional service delivery or economies of scale. (Seattle 44)

Metropolitan Special District

The Municipality of Metropolitan Seattle, before its merger with King County, was an example of a Metropolitan Service District. This District has a foundation in state legislation and is designed to serve limited functions for a designated area. Special Districts are flexible entities that can encompass many cities, counties, and unincorporated areas. They can be structured to have different governing bodies and isolate specific problems in an area. But if Special Districts do not

consolidate other governments, more government fragmentation is created, hindering the ability of citizens to comprehend and control governments. Special governments can also begin to compete with local governments for scarce resources, become hostile, and increase the costs of government. The incorporation of Seattle Metro into King County was spawned by many of the issues related to the negative effects of government coordination. (Seattle 49)

Metropolitan County and Comprehensive Urban County

The Metropolitan County is similar to the current state of King County after its merger with Seattle Metro. The Metropolitan County assumes many of the functions of a municipality but over a larger area including unincorporated areas and other municipalities. This merger eliminated a layer of government, Seattle Metro, and increased the service area dramatically. The negative effects of this type of merger include some hostility between the cities and towns once controlling those services. This is evident in some negative reactions of Seattle leadership during the talks about Metro's merger with King County. (Seattle 52)

Metropolitan Federation

A Metropolitan Federation attempts to assign functions appropriate for area-wide performance to a higher regional authority while leaving the local municipalities to provide functions more appropriate to smaller jurisdictions. This category can also include King County's Metro responsibilities as an example of a more regional government providing area-wide services. A Metropolitan Federation is seen as a greater area-wide approach to solving problems that avoids City-County consolidation and maintains some polycentricity in a metropolitan area. A federation, depending on its government structure, can increase administrative professionalism but also induce the political break-up of the lower governments or central city. (Seattle 56, Kincaid par. 33-38)

City-County Consolidation

City-County consolidation attempts to merge two or more governments to create a single government with a new identity. Consolidation can include all or only some cities within the county boundary. The participating governments are dissolved and the functions and assets are taken over by the new government. New York-New York County is one of the earliest and most notable City-County consolidations. This type of consolidation deters the creation of new districts to deliver services, can provide better service delivery to unincorporated areas, and create more uniform taxation and planning functions. Many consolidation efforts have been defeated, however, on fears of reduction in political influence of citizens and the creation of a larger more unresponsive government. (Seattle 59)

Council of Governments (COG's), Regional Planning Commission, and Substate Districts

These types of associations are generally voluntary and developed to foster more cooperation. Their weak powers make them popular among citizens because they do not have the authority to levy taxes, pass ordinances or require action by local governments. These characteristics, however, create an organization that lacks financial autonomy and the coerciveness to force implementation of policies or programs. Administrative costs are usually low due to the availability of federal grants and the use of existing elected officials to conduct business. These governments generally have boundaries that are more appropriate for dealing with regional issues, but their lack of authority and power make them almost useless in setting regional policy. (Seattle 64)

Over the last three decades, Seattle and King County have investigated these methods of reform in search of improved regional governance. Though the theory is abundant, there are a few working examples set above the rest as successful working models of regional reform. The governments often noted in the research include the City-County consolidation effort by Indianapolis that created "Unigov", the former two-tier federation of Toronto (just recently reformed into a single municipality in 1999), the Multi Purpose Council in the Twin Cities known as "Metro", and Portland's metropolitan Service District, "Metro" (Foster, Harrigan, Seattle, League of Women Voters).

City-County Consolidation – Unigov (Indianapolis)

City-County consolidation is defined as the unification of the governments of one or more cities with their county government. Consolidation can be complete in terms of creating a single new government or partial by the exclusion of cities within the county or by maintaining the identity of the county government to provide a few key functions. Unigov is an example of partial consolidation with a small number of cities that opted out of consolidation. (Seattle 59)

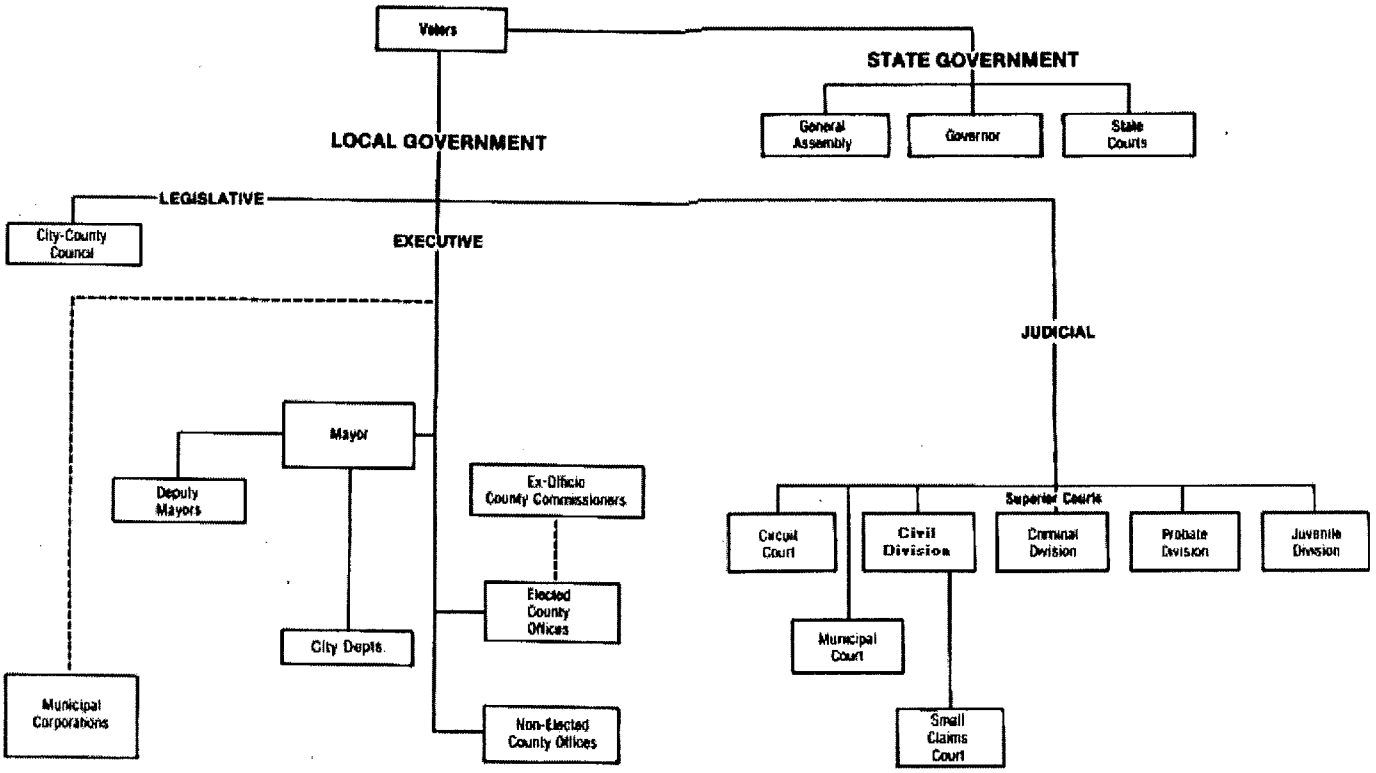
Service Comparison

	Unigov	Metro King County
Population	860 Thousand	1.68 Million
Land Area	361.7 sq. miles	2,134 sq. miles
Operating Budget	$449 Million	$2.5 Billion
Employees	3,500	13,523

Distribution of Responsibilities

Unigov is the result of cities within a county consolidating with that county, creating a new government. The result is that Unigov has the typical responsibilities of a city and the regional responsibilities of a county. Unigov makes laws, levies taxes, and provides public safety services common to both counties and cities. (Unigov Handbook)

GOVERNMENT IN INDIANAPOLIS AND MARION COUNTY – AN OVERVIEW*



Political and Historical Highlights – *A Political Opportunity*

On January 1st, 1970, an idea that had been lingering in limbo for twenty years became a reality. Then Governor of Indiana Richard Lugar took advantage of a GOP takeover of the legislature and coordinated the City-County Consolidation of Indianapolis and Marion County (Ferguson). Marion County, the county with which Indianapolis and some suburban cities would merge, was largely Republican and supported Lugar. This majority aided Lugar as he maneuvered the proposal through the legislature. The merger increased the city's tax base, but also solidified GOP control in the City-County. The city of Indianapolis expanded its boundaries and merged with 17 of its surrounding suburbs and Marion County to create what is called Unigov, short for Unigovernment. Four smaller metropolitan communities within Marion County opted out of the merger. Many units of government were consolidated and the City Council joined with the County Council to become the City-County Council. The structure of the new government mimicked the federal government by dividing into three branches, the executive, the legislative, and the judicial (Unigov Handbook).

Two Tier Federation - Toronto

An upper tier of government, generally a reconstituted county government, is formed to provide regional services while a lower tier of town and municipalities supplies local services. (Seattle 56)

Service Comparison

	Toronto	Metro King County
Population	2.5 million	1.68 Million
Land Area	392 sq. miles	2,134 sq. miles
Operating Budget	US$4 Billion	$2.5 Billion
Employees	45,000	13,523

Distribution of Responsibilities

For over forty years, Toronto has served as a model of federated regional governance. But at the close of the century, the Provincial government changed Toronto's structure into a single municipality. Prior to this "amalgamation" of tiers, the responsibilities of the regional government and the local governments were divided in the following manner in an effort to achieve greater economies of scale and consistent planning in these services (League of Women Voters 7).

A = Area wide responsibilities of upper tier of government

M = Municipal responsibilities of lower tier of government

Finance and Taxation	
Assessment of property	M
Courts of revision	MA
Taxation of property	A
Debenture borrowing	M
Local improvement charges	A

Planning	
Official plans	MA
Subdivision approval	MA
Zoning	A

Recreation/ Community Services	
Regional parks	M
Local parks	A
Recreation programs	A
Community centres/ arenas	A
Municipal golf courses	M
Municipal zoo	M
Regional libraries	M
Local libraries	MA
Grants to cultural societies	MA

Road Construction/ Maintenance	
Expressways	M
Arterial roads	M
Local roads	A
Bridges and grade separations	MA
Snow removal	MA
Street cleaning	MA
Sidewalks	A

Traffic Control	
Traffic regulations	MA
Cross-walks	MA
Traffic lights	M
Street lighting	A
Pavement markings	MA

Public Transit	
Toronto Transit Comm.	M

Water Supply	
Purification, pumping and trunk distribution system	M
Local distribution	A
Collection of water bills	A

Sewage Disposal	
Sanitary trunk system and disposal plants	M
Connecting systems	A
Storm drainage	MA

Garbage Collection and Disposal	
Collection	A
Disposal sites	M

Air Pollution	
Air pollution control	M

Public Education	
Operation of school system	A
School sites, attendance areas, building programs	M
Operating and capital costs	M

Housing	
Low rental family housing	M
Elderly person housing	M
Moderate rental family housing	A

Welfare	
Welfare assistance	M
Hospitalization of indigents	M
Assistance to Children's Aid Societies	M
Homes for the aged	M

Health	
Public health services	A
Chronic and convalescent hospital	M
Hospital grants	A
Ambulance services	M

Police and Fire Protection	
Police	M
Fire	A

Administration of Justice	
Magistrates' courts	M
Court house and jail	M
Juvenile and family court	M
Coroner's office	M
Registry and land titles offices	M

Licensing and Inspection	
Business licensing	M
Dog licensing and pound	A
Marriage licenses	A
Buildings by-laws	A

Civil Defense	
Emergency measures	M

Other Municipal Services	
Collection of fines	MA
Collection of vital statistics	A
Distribution of hydro power	A
Harbor	A
Island airport	A
Municipal parking lots	A
Preparation of voters' lists and administration of civic elections	A
Redevelopment	MA

Historical Highlights – *Changes Seek to Bring Savings*

For over four decades, Toronto has been the international example of two-tier metropolitan government. In 1953, the Ontario provincial government established the municipality of Metropolitan Toronto in response to problems of unequal and deficient social services, exploding suburbs, and increased burdens of infrastructure financing placed on higher governments. The "Metro" was formed as a two-tier government combining Toronto with 12 (later reduced to 6) suburban cities (Kelman). The lower government was responsible for the delivery of local and municipal services and any property-based issues (local planning, local roads, fire, waste collection) while the upper tier dealt with the more regional issues such as police protection, major roads and public transportation, water purification and sewage treatment. Though the lines between responsibilities were not always clear, Metro worked relatively effectively in providing infrastructure through the pooling and redistribution of tax revenues, a relatively experimental idea at the time, and achieved some scale economies in service provision (Bourne par. 46-48).

Throughout its existence, minor attempts to shift responsibilities up to the Metro level proved inadequate in dealing with a rapidly growing and fragmenting region (Bourne par. 47). The urban landscape and population exploded around Metro but the boundaries of the municipality did not grow. To deal with the suburban problem, instead of expanding Metro, the suburban cities were amalgamated into four other two-tier governments. The new suburban governments were not as effective in dealing with their regional problems as was Metro. Several attempts to reorganize the Greater Toronto Area involved the establishment of a GTA office in the provincial government as well as a task force to investigate possibilities for the future of the GTA. The result was the establishment of a Greater Toronto Service Board (GTSB) that provides some regional coordination.

Recently, due to a swing to a more conservative government after a 1995 provincial election, in 1998 Metro was changed to a single municipal form of government with its surrounding federal suburbs left unchanged. The Provincial government sought to reduce government size, achieve costs reductions, and improve service delivery. (Kelman)

In 1998, Toronto's target savings through this effort at $150 million over 3 years, a reduction of 10% of the $1.5 billion gross expenditures of the duplicated programs. The bulk of amalgamations savings is being achieved through staff reductions. (Kelman) The following table shows some of the organizational changes:

Number of:	Prior to Amalgamation	Single Municipality
Departments	52	6
Divisions	206	37
Executive positions	381	154
Management positions	1837	1204

Kelman, Director of Transportation Systems with the City of Toronto, suggest that the full fiscal benefits of amalgamation will not be realized until at least 2004 as the new staff culture matures.

Regional Multi-Purpose Council – Twin Cities

The Twin Cities Metro Council was created by the state legislature, with member appointed by the governor, to focus on policy and coordination rather than actual service delivery though it does have an important role in financing services and redistributing regional tax revenues. (The Governance Project ch. 9)

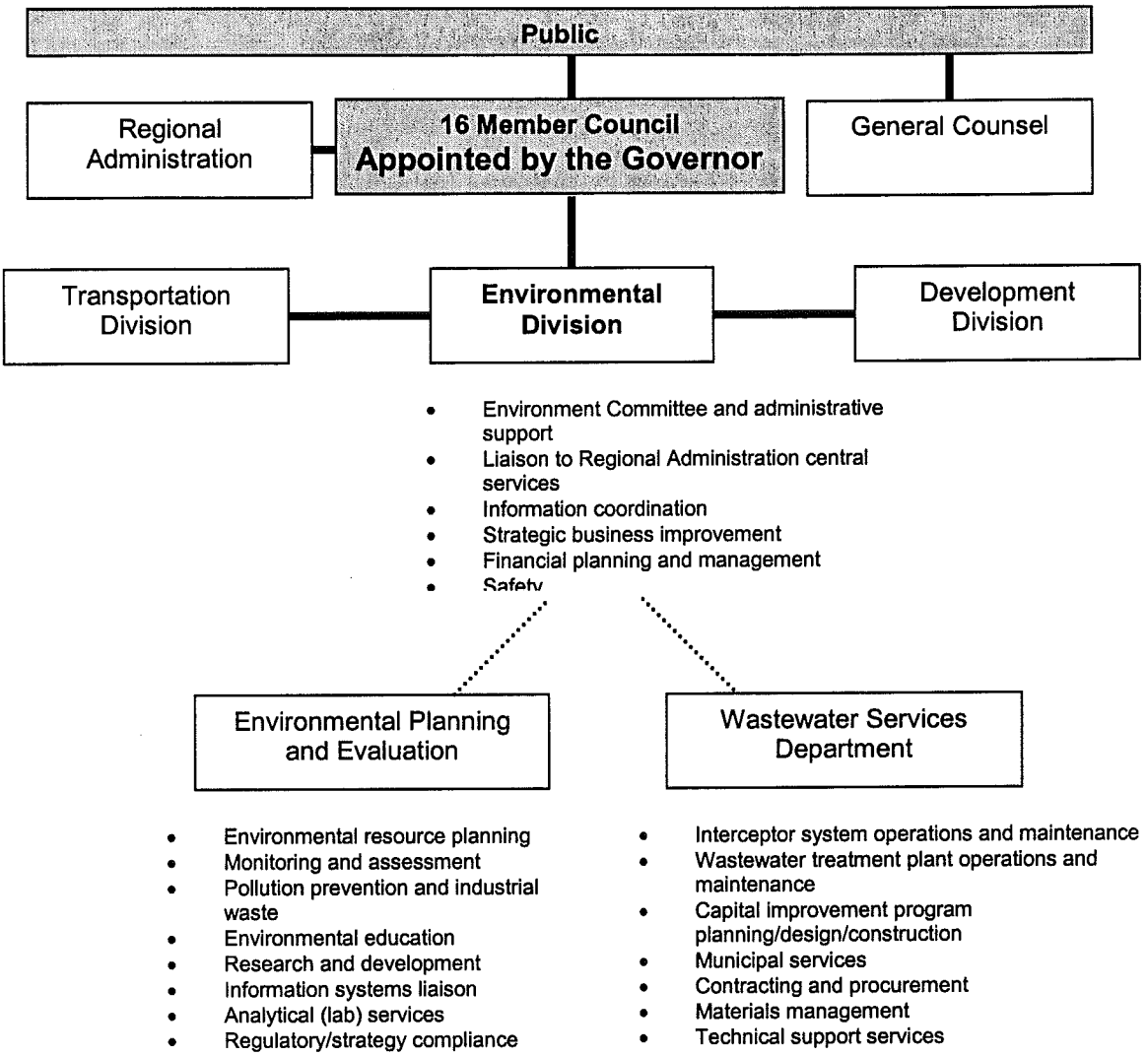
Service Comparison

	Twin Cities Metro	Metro King County
Population	2.4 million	1.68 Million
Land Area	2,974 sq. miles	2,134 sq. miles
Operating Budget	$295 Million	$2.5 Billion
Employees	3,700	13,523

Distribution of Responsibilities

The Metro Council is divided into three divisions. The Community Development Division is responsible for regional growth and development planning. This division also provides assisted living housing. The Environmental Services Division's primary responsibility is the treatment of wastewater and improvement of water quality. The Transportation Division has two units; one focused on development of transportation and transit infrastructure and the other providing transit services. Metro Transit, the service provider, is one of the country's largest transit systems, providing over 60 million bus trips annually (Metro Homepage, About Metro Council).

Adapted from the Metro Council Environmental Services Website, this organizational chart outlines the basic divisions of Metro with an emphasis on the environmental responsibilities that may be of interest to DNR.



Political and Historical Highlights – Regional Partners

For forty years prior to Metro Council's establishment in 1967, citizens of the Twin Cities had been working together on solutions to regional problems such as sewage collection and treatment, airport development, and comprehensive planning (Harrigan 22-23). Regional thinking and cooperation were not new. But with the proliferation of special districts to deal with these problems, the new problem of coordination presented itself. During the 50's and 60's, as suburban growth crippled service delivery and the ability to create consistent development plans, the districts and the legislature found themselves unable to meet the tasks of creating comprehensive policy for the region. Members of the state legislature and reform-minded citizens sought the creation of a regional policy-setting and planning agency out of practical concerns for the immediate problems of growth that were not being effectively managed by the existing government agencies (Harrigan 28).

After a variety of proposals were considered, the Metropolitan Council was established by the state legislature to replace the weak Metropolitan Planning Commission. The Council was also stronger than other voluntary Councils of Governments being created in other metropolitan areas. The Council was funded through property tax and the membership was established through representative districts crossing municipal boundaries with each member appointed by the Governor. Through this structure, funding was consistent and power was evenly shared across the region.

Regional Multi-Purpose District – Portland

These districts are often facilitated by state law and result in an elected regional government that provides services to a regional area. These districts are usually flexible and can later acquire additional responsibilities. (Seattle 49)

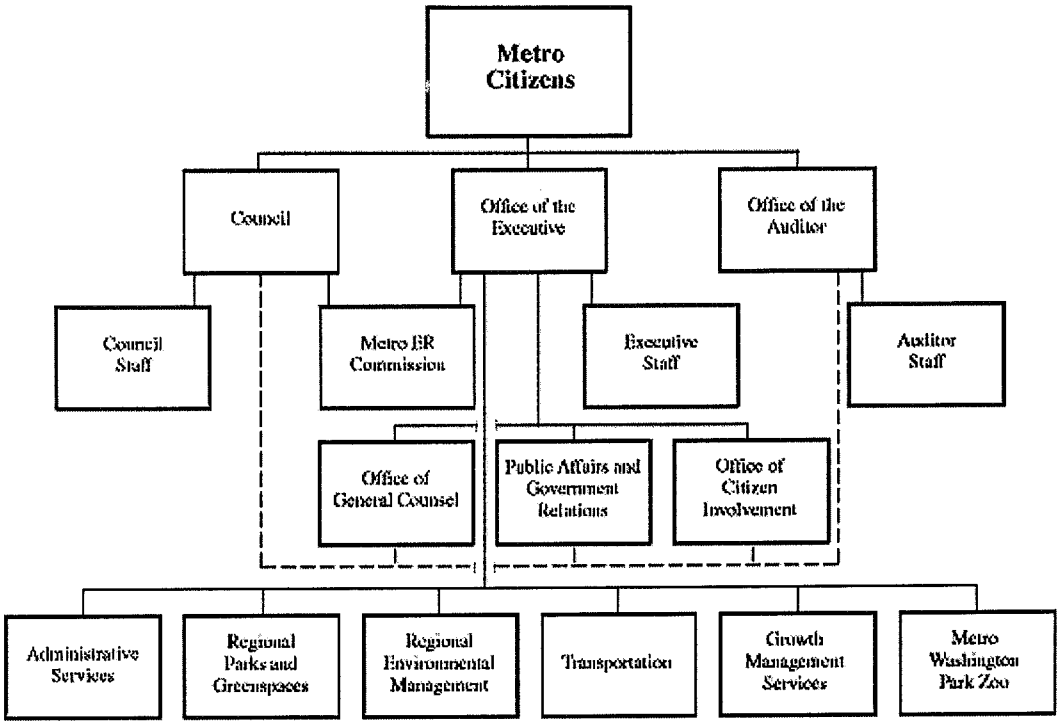
Service Comparison

	Portland Metro	Metro King County
Population	1.4 million	1.68 Million
Land Area	460 sq. miles	2,134 sq. miles
Operating Budget	$263 Million	$2.5 Billion
Employees	693	13,523

Distribution of Responsibilities

Portland Metro serves the urban portion of 3 member counties, Clackamas, Multnomah and Washington, and 24 cities in the Portland metropolitan area. The primary responsibilities of Metro are in regional growth and transportation planning and the management of some services such as zoos, parks and green space, and performing arts centers. (Portland Metro)

The following chart, from the Metro website, illustrates Metro's basic organizational structure:



Political and Historical Highlights – *From Mergers to "Home-Rule"*

In 1958, the Metropolitan Planning Commission was established to serve the city of Portland and the three suburban counties of Clackamas, Multnomah and Washington. Primarily a research organization, the MPC provided information to local planning departments through the creation of maps and demographic and land-use databases. In 1966, the Columbia Region Association of Governments replaced the MPC due to funding pressure from the federal government to create a more representative regional government. CRAG's territory was larger than the MPC's, but still provided the same type of services. Through the 60's, CRAG failed to effectively develop comprehensive land-use plans that affected member city ambitions or plans for growth, creating a scenario of uncoordinated growth. (University of Texas) In 1979, voters approved the merger of CRAG with the metropolitan service provider, the Metropolitan Service District. The new agency was smaller and held the numerous responsibilities of waste services, water quality, and correctional programs, among other duties. The culmination of Metro's evolution was in 1992 when voters approved a home-rule charter changing the MSD to "Metro" while clarifying and strengthening its responsibilities as a regional planning authority. (Portland Metro)

Exploration of Key Themes

Each of the successful models of regional government that were highlighted has developed in a political and legislative context unique to the respective region. However, these contexts share some similar themes that the Department of Natural Resources should be aware of if seeking to consolidate regional authorities.

The Nature of the Problem: Suburban Growth

Each model was built to respond to problems created by explosive post-war suburban growth. These problems were not being effectively dealt with by existing government agencies. The problems created by suburban growth included increased fragmentation, inconsistent service delivery across socioeconomic classes, and the inability to develop comprehensive plans over multiple municipalities. These problems posed direct and visible threats to the quality of life in the respective regions and aided the mobilization of citizens and government officials in an effort to develop regional solutions. DNR has put forth the consideration of saving time and money as a possible reason for consolidating regional authority. These considerations played but a small part in the success of the model structures and may not be adequate to build support for organizational change.

Building an Organization: Representation vs. Function

Issues of representation often overshadow the functional responsibilities of regional organizations. Unigov, Portland Metro, and King County Metro had to seriously consider issues of representation prior to their legal establishment. In the cases of Unigov and Portland Metro, concessions had to be made regarding jurisdiction in order to ensure political feasibility. King County succeeded in merging with Seattle Metro only after a judge stated that Metro's representative structure violated the 14th amendment. If DNR seeks to establish a stronger consolidated regional authority, the needs of proper representation may overshadow the idea that a regional government may provide improved services.

Overall Structure – Historically and Politically Significant

Finally, each model was set in a unique historical and political context that cannot be compared from region to region. Toronto's restructuring was on recommendation from a provincial commission. Unigov was established in a window of political opportunity. The Twin Cities had a history of cooperation on regional issues prior to the establishment of a regional government. Portland Metro evolved out of numerous attempts at developing a comprehensive planning authority. The implementation of a successful model seems to rely, at least in part, on relationships and timing. DNR may need to take stock of the current regional establishments in the

Puget Sound, their legal authority, and the political or legislative support for an improved regional government before a structure is established.

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Findings and Recommendations

1) The ability of service consolidation and mergers to provide economies of scale and improved accountability is not solidly supported by empirical evidence.

Proponents of institutional reform contend that regional service delivery helps create economic efficiencies through economies of scale. Opponents of this theory, supporting the Public Choice perspective, contend that the local delivery of services promotes economic efficiencies through greater diversity of service delivery and competitive market mechanisms. Neither group has been able to provide much evidence in support of either theory, largely due to a lack of empirical data (Foster 66, Kincaid par. 60). Illustrating why there is little consensus on the political and fiscal implications of specialized governance among studies that do exists, Kathryn Foster states:

"Inconclusive findings stem in part from variations in research design, variable choices, and measurement. Yet even when researchers employ similar methodologies and yield comparable outcomes, researchers' methodological approach to special districts often suffers from flaws that cast doubt on findings." (Foster 84)

The issue of improving accountability through greater regional governance is also unclear. The methods of regional governance discussed focus primarily on moving local authority for services to higher levels of government: the regional authority. Thus, the issue of accountability becomes one of perspective. Citizens lose their ability to hold local officials accountable for the services as their voting power is diluted across the regional population within the authority's jurisdiction. Conversely, the administration of the service, through consolidation, becomes managed through fewer or perhaps a single authority, easing the ability of officials and bureaucrats to hold individual organizations accountable for the effects of service delivery over the entire region. The multiple dimensions of accountability and the lack of evidence regarding the fiscal implications of regional service delivery lead to the conclusion that, at this point in time, the effectiveness of government arrangements in these areas are matters of perspective and value choices (Kincaid par 60).

Recommendation to DNR

DNR should not look to existing models of regional governance efforts to save money and improve accountability. While the models provide different organizational structures, there is no evidence that one structure deals with these issues more efficiently than the next. Internal scrutiny of existing regional organizations in the Puget Sound may be more effective than trying to replicate or compare models in other states in order to achieve savings. This would reduce the complications of comparing the political, regulatory, and organizational environments unique to the numerous regions where successful efforts of regionalism have been championed.

Currently, the County is undergoing an organizational change that must save millions of dollars through organizational redesign and the cooperation of numerous department heads. Similarly, an effort to redesign regional government in the Puget Sound will require the cooperation of state legislators, officials of current regional authorities, and an effort to study the possibilities of increasing economic efficiency by using our own data as opposed to assuming models from other regions. Since national data is indeterminate, the regional authorities of Puget Sound must study the costs and quality of service delivery unique to our region. Accountability, too, will be a matter of importance since demands will be unique to the political characteristics of the constituencies involved. There is no knowing what structure of representation will be appropriate without dialogue and internal scrutiny.

2) The contemporary models of regional governance are different, some significantly, in history and evolution from those in King County and Washington State, but not so in service delivery or regulatory authority.

King County has been an active participant in the national movement to regionalize applicable services and provide more comprehensive planning through the development of regional structures. Puget Sound is a recognized region in these efforts with such examples as Seattle Metro, King County Metro, and cooperative initiatives such as the Tri-County Salmon effort and the Puget Sound Regional Council. This region has performed admirably in facing the challenges of regional problems by developing structures that are similar in scope to those that currently exist across the nation. These structures include organizations such as the Puget Sound Regional Council, the Puget Sound Air Quality Management District, and the Puget Sound Water Quality Action Team. While we have developed with the national trend, and exceeded it in the case of such organizations as the Tri-County Salmon effort, the national trend does not seem to have provided models for an even greater regional governance system that would consolidate or merge the numerous responsibilities of these regional organizations.

Additionally, the scope and instituted structure of regional models seem to rest more with political palatability, legislative compromise, and economic urgency than their contemplative and theoretical foundations. Issues of representation and citizen fear of greater government figure heavily in the political reality of initiating any government structure. Thus, by looking across the nation at models of regional service delivery in order to create our own, we risk ignoring the contextual underpinnings of our own political and organizational environment that could provide greater guidance in building more effective regional organizations.

Recommendation to DNR

From annexation to Councils of Governments, King County has made use of numerous methods to improve regional government. In order to take the next step and consolidate, merge, or better coordinate our current structures of regional authority, DNR must engage the current regional authorities in a conversation about the need for, and the feasibility of, greater regional authority. To do so, it might be to DNR's benefit to follow the example of San Diego County. San Diego County has now begun to formally ask the question of how to coordinate its multiple regional agencies such as Port Districts, Airport Authorities and Water Quality Districts. By introducing state legislation Senator Steve Peace, a Democrat from La Mesa, has started a process of public debate and investigation by establishing a "Regional Efficiency Commission", seeking ways to coordinate regional authority (Commission Homepage). Their Commission, too, has been investigating the Twin Cities and Portland for clues of effective regional reform but in a context of public debate that grounds their exploration concretely in the context of local politics. This reality creates a focus that concentrates discussion on some of the weaknesses of regional governments such as diluted political control and poor representation and accountability while building a dialogue for the construction of a new authority. I am not suggesting, necessarily, that the Department of Natural Resources embark on such a public debate, but at least to raise the question of how to better coordinate regional services among those agencies that would be affected -- organizations such as the Puget Sound Regional Council, the Puget Sound Air Quality Management District, the Puget Sound Water Quality Action Team, and elected representatives of the four county area, many of whom are members of these agencies.

This recommendation is made on the supposition that a consensus on need and political feasibility must be reached before DNR can assume that a consolidated authority will serve the region more efficiently. Need and political feasibility established within the context of local political and organizational culture will be stronger determinants of the success of an effort to further consolidate regional authorities than the success of other models elsewhere. If seeking to consolidate regional authorities, the question that needs to be asked is not "what regional authorities exist elsewhere?" but "what regional authorities can exist here in the Puget Sound?" This necessitates understanding the current attitudes of regional authorities in the Sound and an idea of political and legislative support for change as well as less relying on the arguments such as economic efficiency that, on the surface, sound like a reasonable rationale for regional consolidation.

Foster, Kathryn. The Political Economy of Special-Purpose Government. Washington: Georgetown University, 1997

Kincaid, John. Regulatory Regionalism in Metropolitan Areas: Voter Resistance and Reform Persistence. Pace University Law Center Land Use Website. 10 May 2001 http://www.law.pace.edu/landuse/

San Diego Regional Efficiency Commission. 24 May 2001 < http://www.sdrgec.org/>

Conclusion

As the research on these models progressed, it became increasingly clear that the issues involved with the development of regional organizations are numerous and too complex to simplify and apply from region to region. Empirical evidence is lacking and their effectiveness rests in theory and perception. Each model of regional governance has developed out of conditions unique to the times and conditions of the respective metropolitan area and each is unusual as a successful reform effort amongst numerous failures nationwide. While problems of organizational coordination are not uncommon, government reform relies heavily on the response of the citizens and legislature and the degree to which the current conditions create a problem worthy of reform. Noting the cause of numerous failures in city-county consolidation efforts, Lowden Wingo states in *Reform of Metropolitan Governments*:

"... the conditions for political reform, then, require some critical mass of the unsatisfied. Lacking this, there is no logic strong enough to bring about the transformation, and that is what the gap between Utopia and Cleveland is all about"(Harrigan)

So too may be the gap between our current government systems and a more efficient method of regional governance. Without addressing our regional partners directly to discuss and act on the inefficiencies evident to DNR regarding our region's multiple agencies, the gap between utopia and King County will remain.

Harrigan, John. Governing the Twin Cities Region: The Metropolitan Council in Comparitive Perspective. St. Paul: U. of Minnesota, 1978.